

DOCUMENT FILE

NOTE

SEE 765.84/928 FOR Despatch #123

FROM Aden (Callanan) DATED August 7, 1935.
TO NAME 1-1127 ***

REGARDING: Italo-Ethiopian controversy. Further reports on the health conditions of Italian troops in Ertirea.

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GDA

G-2 Report



OFFICE CHIEF OF STAFF,
MIL. INTELL. DIV.

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SEP 24 1935
WAR DEPARTMENT

ITALY (POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS)

Subject : Public Health and Sanitation

Health conditions and sanitation in Eritrea.

SEP 25 1935

DIVISION OF

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The following are extracts from the Paris "Le Temps" correspondent in Eritrea under date line of September 8th. After paying tribute to the mild climate of Asmara, "a delightful oasis of Africa", the correspondent goes on to say, "the advantages are offset by the high altitude effect which is most pronounced. At Asmara (7,800 ft.) altitude effect is about the same as at 15,000 ft. in the Alps, due to temperature and irradiation. Rarefaction of oxygen in the air is specially notable if a rapid ascent from the torrid zone on the Red Sea coast to the plateau is attempted. For this reason the military command has established that troops on their way to the Eritrean plateau will bivouac at Nefasit, a half way point (3,900 ft.) to acclimatize. Physically sound and normal soldiers acclimatize easily.

" Atmospheric conditions affect the functioning of motors. Slopes which in Italy may be taken in high, here require considerable gear-shifting; gasoline consumption is higher. Aircraft are especially affected, and changes have had to be made to allow airplanes to function under the extraordinary atmospheric conditions. Just as motors are affected, so is the human heart. Officers and soldiers cannot be subjected to the same strenuous physical exercise as in Italy. Abyssinians, on the other hand, are perfectly at home under these conditions - like fish in water. They are speedier than Italians, and excellent marchers, easily doing 40 and more miles per day. But the Italian is stronger, more enduring to hard work, than the Abyssinian.

" High altitude is far better than an unhealthy climate. Thus the Expeditionary Force is working under climatic conditions similar to those of Europe. For this reason health conditions are excellent. The percentage of illness and casualties is no higher than in Italy, and at any rate below the expected. Physicians are favorably impressed, because it is known that colonial campaigns in torrid climates cause greater losses from illness and diseases than from combat. In Eritrea, smallpox, typhus, malaria, African periodic fever, and dysentery may cause some ravages. Soldiers and civilians debarking at Massawa are vaccinated against smallpox and typhus without exception. The fight against malaria is more difficult. But it is a known fact that in this field of research, Italian science is in the lead. The malarial zones of Eritrea are known and marked down. In order to stamp out this scourge, the Army Medical Service has created a detailed organization. Swamps and ponds are covered over with oil. Camps are fumigated, and each soldier must swallow a quinine pill each day, and for a period of fifteen days after leaving malarial zones. Periodic fevers have ravaged Assab, on the Red Sea, for several weeks, but is now abating. Some cases of dysentery have also been reported. The situation, however, is such that full confidence may be had. The Italian race is, besides, one of the healthiest, and its powers of adaptation are well known.

" If hostilities begin, the Medical Service will of course double its efforts. Totally lacking in hygiene and sanitation control, Ethiopia is the land of maladies. An epidemic of meningitis, in a severe and rapid form, is at the present time ravaging some of its provinces. Typhus and dysentery obtain in endemic state up to the frontiers of

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Eritrea, and the plague occurs in some frontier zones facing the Sudan. The high military command has foreseen the danger, and vaccines, cures, antiseptics, medicines, all that science has to offer, are being prepared. Twelve depots of medical material have been set up at Massawa and five at Asmara. Eritrea now has 18,000 hospital beds, which is more than sufficient for needs. From the Ethiopian frontier to the Red Sea extends a system of ambulances and lazarets, ready to operate on a day's notice. Three hospital-ships are anchored in the port of Massawa, and soon there will be nine, due to the distance to be covered to Italy.

" The water supply problem has engaged the attention of the high command for many long weeks. Africa is the land of thirst. Even where water exists, measures of precaution and hygiene are indispensable. When potable water is available in Africa, one may go far, very far ... Difficulties in this respect have been numerous, but may now be considered overcome. New reservoirs and aqueducts have been built at Massawa and Asmara, the distribution system improved. Assab is about to commence the distillation of sea water in great quantities. New wells are bored, and tank trucks follow the troop movements. Refrigerator trucks distribute tons of frozen beef unloaded from the ships; bread is made from wheat grown in Italy. The transportation of vegetables from Italy is also being planned.

" One may conclude that the greatest difficulties which the high command has had to face have now been overcome. No General Staff of any other country could have done better. It has been asserted that Italy has prepared a war with Ethiopia for the past 40 years! This is untrue, because all preparations have been accomplished from March to August, 1935. In the space of five months an army of 120,000 men has been transported 4,000 kilometers from the peninsular into a tropical country. Its services have been ensured. It is already in fighting condition, ready for action. This success derives from various causes. At the foundation is the great dynamic force of the regime, then the skill of commanders, the ability of technicians, the abnegation of workmen and soldiers. Finally and above all, there is the resolution and willingness of all Italy. "

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NO COMMENT.

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